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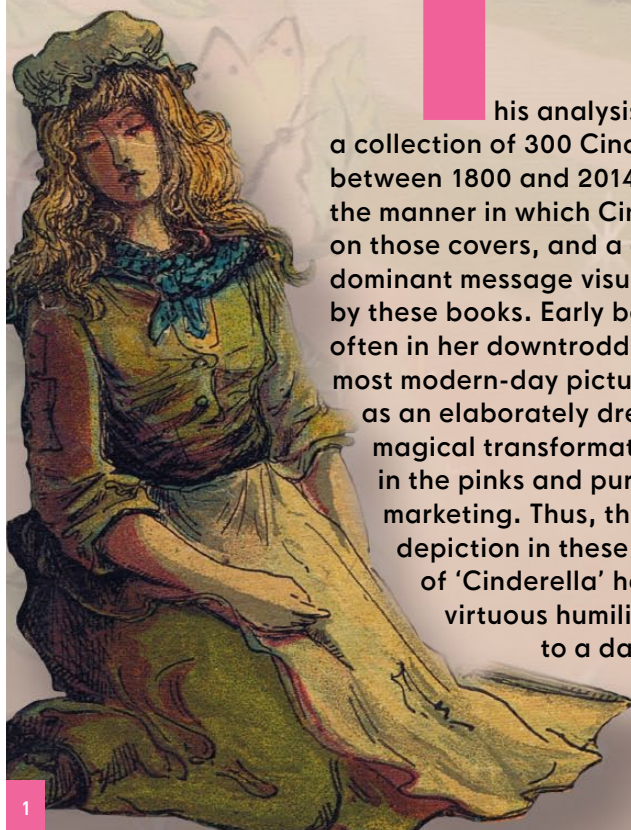
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# FROM RAGS TO SPLENDOR: THE EVOLUTION OF CINDERELLA COVER ILLUSTRATIONS FROM 1800 TO 2014



This analysis of the cover images of a collection of 300 Cinderella picture books published between 1800 and 2014 reveals marked trends in the manner in which Cinderella has been portrayed on those covers, and a corresponding switch in the dominant message visually communicated to children by these books. Early books depicted Cinderella most often in her downtrodden state, dressed in rags, but most modern-day picture-book covers show Cinderella as an elaborately dressed beauty, reveling in her magical transformation into a visual spectacle, in the pinks and purples of contemporary 'princess' marketing. Thus, through Cinderella's visual depiction in these children's books, the meaning of 'Cinderella' has shifted from a model of virtuous humility for young women to emulate to a dazzling display for little girls to consume and imitate.

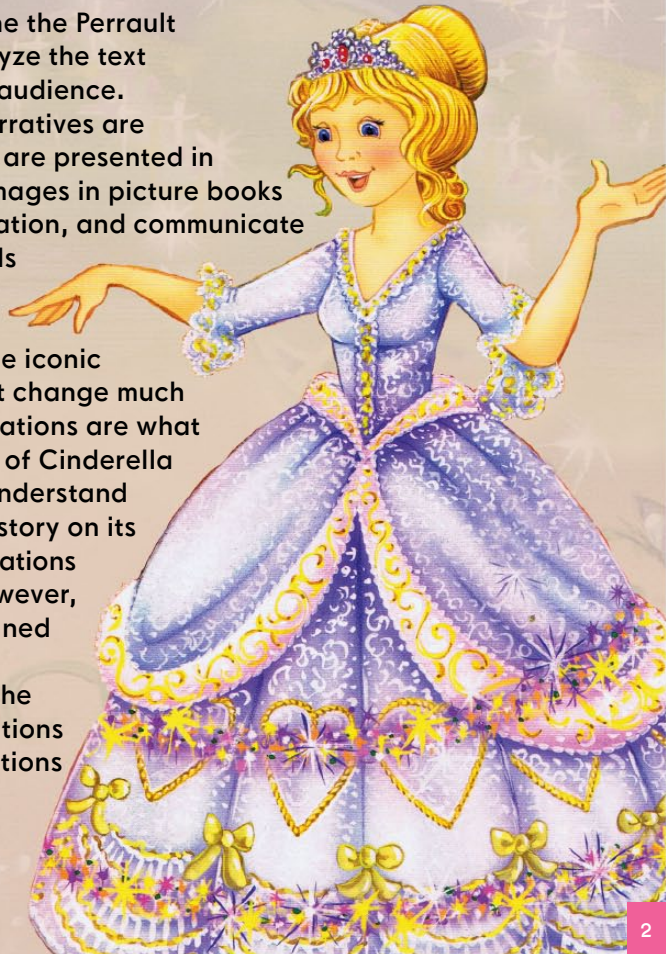


Cinderella is consistently cited as the best-known and most-loved of all fairy tales, with over 700 documented versions of the tale dating as far back as 9th-century China (Parsons, 2004). Because story-telling is 'a primary means of transmitting cultural values from one generation to the next', iconic children's stories such as Cinderella play key roles in how cultures socialize children (Crisp and Hiller, 2011: 197–198). In particular, fairy tales, with their prince and princess characters, may influence gender-role socialization, a process which starts before children enter kindergarten.

The Cinderella tale most readers know best is Charles Perrault's 1697 version, in which Cinderella is a passive young woman with little agency. Jack Zipes (2006: 20) argues she was deliberately designed this way as an exemplar of proper, civilized behavior for French noble woman to emulate. Later, in Victorian England, Perrault's Cinderella was adopted by British children's book publishers to the effective exclusion of all others. Perrault's Cinderella 'won out' over other versions of the tale because his demure, passive, and forbearing Cinderella was the best fit with the Victorian feminine ideal (Cullen, 2003: 74). Consequently, Perrault's version has dominated English-language Cinderella books since the mid-1800s.

Researchers who examine the Perrault Cinderella story tend to analyze the text and its possible effect on its audience. However, most Cinderella narratives are geared for children and thus are presented in picture book form, and the images in picture books illicit emotions, spark imagination, and communicate how things look in ways words alone cannot convey (Nodelman, 1984).

Additionally, because the iconic Cinderella narrative does not change much from book to book, the illustrations are what often distinguish one version of Cinderella from another. Thus, to fully understand the impact of the Cinderella story on its audience, studying the illustrations as well as the text is vital. However, very few scholars have examined Cinderella illustrations at all. Further, none has examined the breadth of Cinderella illustrations over time or analyzed illustrations published after 1980.



In contrast, this study focuses on the cover illustrations of 315 English-language Perrault-version Cinderella picture books published in the US and the UK between 1800 and 2014. The analysis was limited to cover illustrations because the cover is the most significant source of readers' expectations for the story, often determining whether they will open the book (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003: 278). The researchers coded each cover image for Cinderella's appearance (e.g. hair color, skin color, gown color) and Cinderella's actions (e.g. sitting by the ashes, dancing with the prince, running down the palace steps). The resulting database allowed the researchers to track changes in how Cinderella was portrayed across time. Results indicate that some aspects of Cinderella (such as her blonde hair color) have remained stable across the decades, while other aspects (such as how Cinderella is dressed) have changed drastically from the 1800s to the present and thus have transformed the meaning of Cinderella over time. What follows in this visual essay is the story of how, through choices made in the visual representation of Cinderella from the 1800s to the 2000s, she has morphed from a model of virtuous humility for young women to emulate to a dazzling princess on display for little girls to imitate.

The first key variable of interest in the current study was Cinderella's type of dress. The research examined whether she was depicted in the cover illustrations wearing her servant's rags or wearing her beautiful ball gown. We found that in the entire data set, Cinderella wore rags on 44 percent of covers and a ball gown on 56 percent. But the majority of the rags images were in early decades, and the majority of the ball gown illustrations were in later decades. On 100 percent of our sample's covers from 1800 to 1890, Cinderella is dressed in rags and shown sitting in the ashes or performing housework. For many decades, this downtrodden Cinderella was the prominent image on picture-book covers, averaging 71 percent of covers per decade through 1929 and appearing on approximately 50 percent of covers in the 1930s and 1940s.

Cinderella was intended to be a role model for middle-class Victorian children, and her frequent appearance in humble rags on the covers of books published in the late 19th and early 20th centuries reflects a general cultural belief









# Walt Disney's CINDERELLA

in promoting the feminine virtues she exhibited: patience in the face of injustice, hard work in contrast to

sloth, and endurance of undeserved hardship.

Thus, in Figures 4, 6, 7, 9, and 11, Cinderella's clothes are patched or torn. That she is garbed for labor is indicated by rolled-up sleeves in Figures 1, 3, 5, and 7. "Servant" status is also indicated by the loose, undressed hair and simple caps in

Figures 1 and 3-9. Her lowly state among the cinders is communicated by her literal placement sitting by the fireplace in

Figures 1, 4, 6, 7, and 10. In contrast, Figures 3, 5, and 9 communicate her servitude by showing her engaged in housework. These early covers also



gb a Little Golden Book

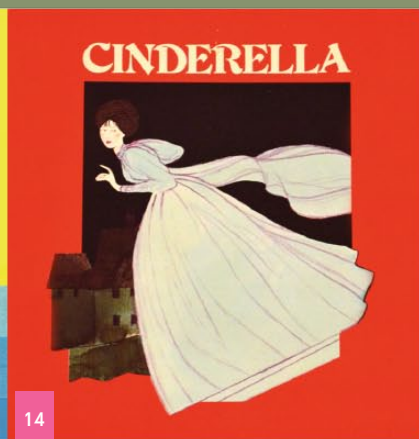
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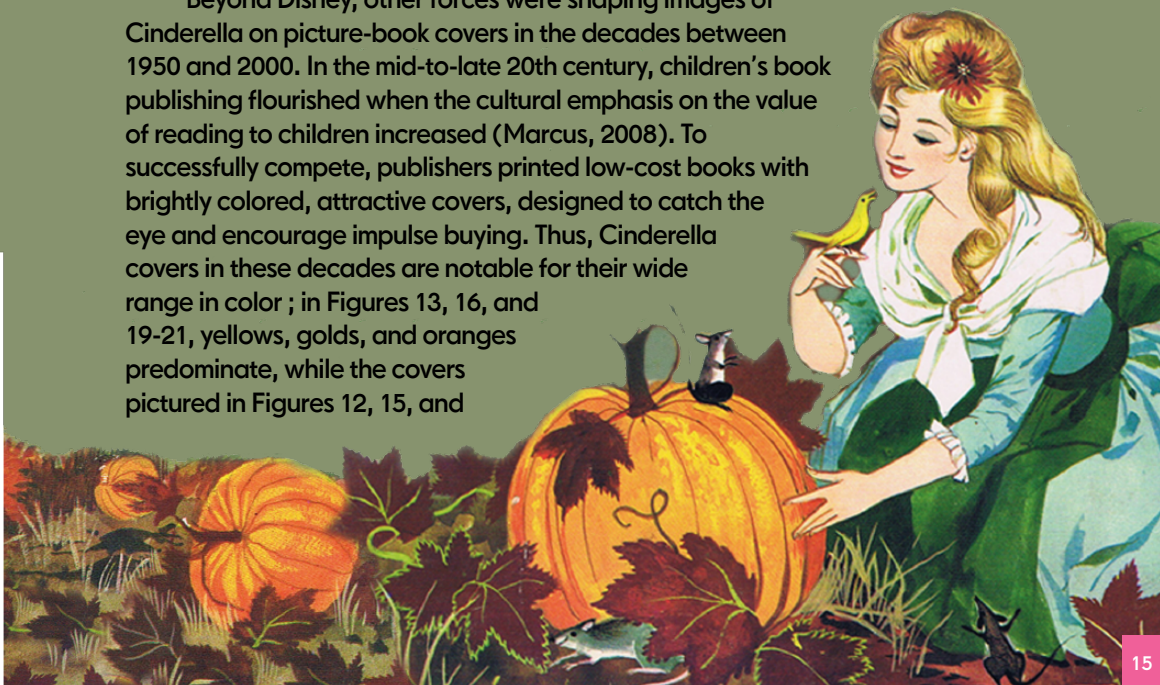


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convey Cinderella's passive and submissive nature by such means as the downcast or averted eyes illustrators gave her in Figures 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9, and these covers communicate her degraded state by the tears or sorrowful or pensive expressions she is given in Figures 1, and 5-7. Together, these illustrative choices give her an attitude of patient suffering and sadness. In sum, as a role model, she is portrayed on these covers as a sweet, modest, attractive girl, who works diligently and endures hardship from the hands of others with both patience and grace.

Then, in 1950, Disney's animated film, *Cinderella*, was released. The cover of the Little Golden Book version of the film did not show Cinderella in rags but instead featured Cinderella on display in her pretty ball gown (see Figure 11). Disney's film and the associated Little Golden Book had a marked influence on Cinderella's appearance in picture books for many years. For instance, while prior books had depicted Cinderella as predominantly blonde, she had never been exclusively blonde before 1950. Through the 1950s and 1960s, however, 100 percent of the covers in this study depicted Cinderella as blonde, resulting in the golden tresses she is given in Figures 11, 12, 15, 19, and 20. Significantly, in Figure 15, this hair is thick and luxurious, comparable to that in Figures 17 and 20, even though in Figure 15, Cinderella is dressed in her rags rather than in her ball gown. Similarly, during this same time period, the percentage of covers showing Cinderella in rags dropped to 17 percent, while cover images of Cinderella in a pretty dress increased to 83 percent. After the 1960s, however, Disney's influence seemed to wane, and between 1970 and 1990, covers returned to an approximate 50–50 split between rags and ball gowns, and a few brunette Cinderellas reappeared. Thus, among the blonde Cinderellas pictured here, we see illustrators giving her hair in various shades of brown in Figures 13, 18, and 21, darkening to a color that approaches black in Figure 14.

Beyond Disney, other forces were shaping images of Cinderella on picture-book covers in the decades between 1950 and 2000. In the mid-to-late 20th century, children's book publishing flourished when the cultural emphasis on the value of reading to children increased (Marcus, 2008). To successfully compete, publishers printed low-cost books with brightly colored, attractive covers, designed to catch the eye and encourage impulse buying. Thus, Cinderella covers in these decades are notable for their wide range in color; in Figures 13, 16, and 19-21, yellows, golds, and oranges predominate, while the covers pictured in Figures 12, 15, and







18 emphasize blues and greens, and Figure 14 is dominated by a bright red. Additionally, on these covers, Cinderella displays a variety of expressions, in contrast to her consistently downtrodden countenance of earlier decades. In Figures 11, 15, 16, and 17, Cinderella appears to be lively, pleased, or contented, rather than sad. Additionally, in Figures 19, 20, and 21, illustrators depict Cinderella as boldly or thoughtfully gazing directly at the reader, rather than modestly sitting with eyes downcast. Also, whether in rags or finery, Cinderella is often moving. In Figure 13, she is sweeping, activity consistent with her servant persona as communicated in earlier covers, but in Figure 12 she is dancing, and in Figure 16, she is running down the palace stairs. Finally, the greater number of covers with Cinderella in her ball gown provides both more emphasis on the story's happy ending and more opportunities for visual interest and appeal. Thus, in Figures 11-13 and 16-17, we see a variety of dress styles featuring ribbons and lace, large sleeves, and flowing trains, as well as tiaras or other decorative hair pieces.

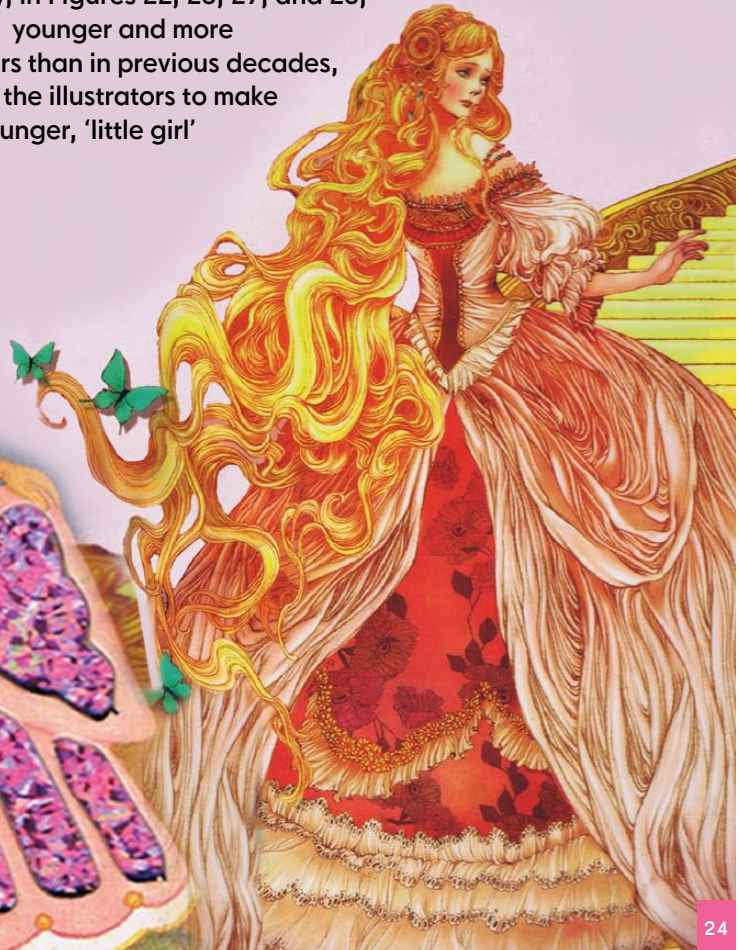
The trend begun in the 1990s toward more depictions of Cinderella in her ball gown escalated significantly after the turn of the millennium. From 2000–2009, 75 percent of picture book covers pictured Cinderella in her ball gown, and from 2010 through 2014, 81 percent did so. This shift toward depicting a gorgeously dressed Cinderella on display for the reader to admire both reflects and contributes to the 'princess culture' being marketed toward little girls today. The birth of the princess culture phenomenon can be attributed to the launch of Disney's 'Princess' merchandizing line in 2000 (Orenstein, 2012). Dominated by four classic Disney animated princesses (Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Ariel, and Belle), this line of over 26,000 princess items ranges

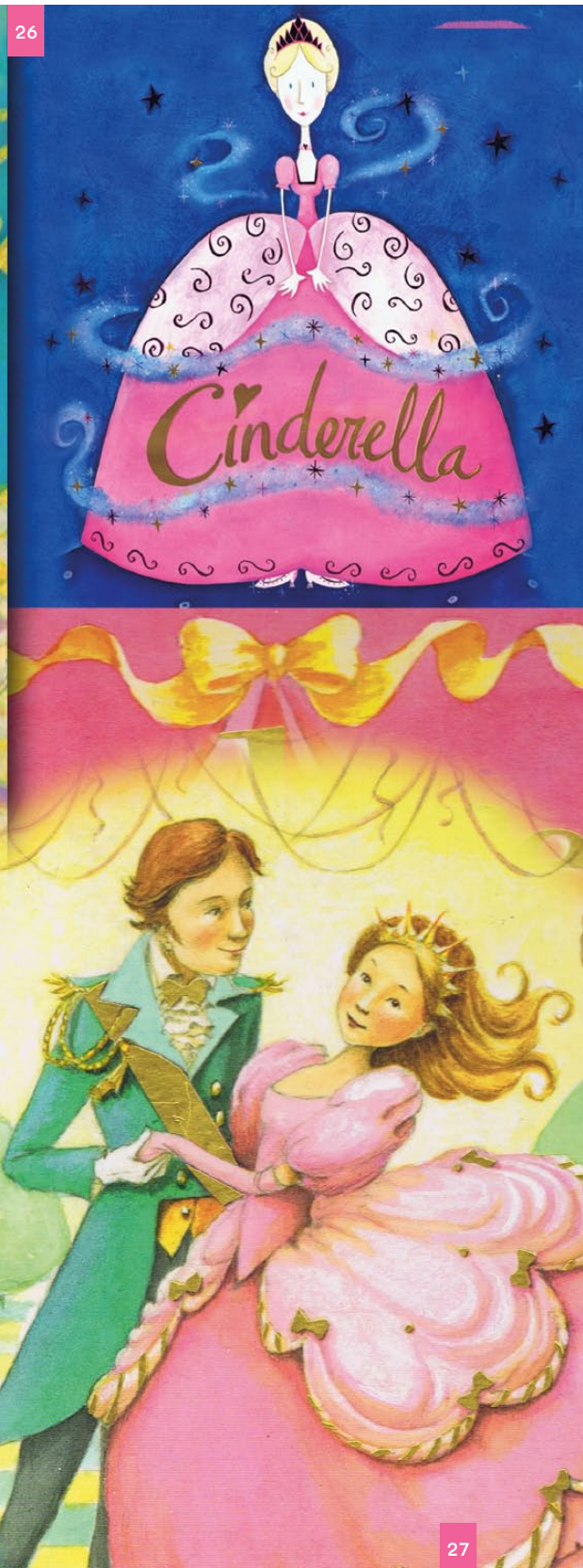
from sparkly costumes and accessories to glitter-encrusted backpacks and school supplies. Its success spurred other manufacturers, such as Mattel, to follow suit with comparably 'prettified' princess-related dolls, toys, and accessories. Consistent with such 'princess culture' marketing, the



trend in the current set of picture-book covers toward images of Cinderella in her ball gown demonstrate a value placed on 'spectacle' and the construction of Cinderella as a visually dazzling 'princess' display.

In these later covers, Cinderella is dressed in elaborate ball gowns that are full-skirted, ornate, and covered in bows, ribbons, glitter, and sparkles. In Figure 27, we again see Cinderella dancing, and we see her running down the palace stairs in Figures 24, 25, and 29, but the number of covers showing Cinderella taking such actions is significantly diminished after the year 2000. Instead, like the majority of post-2000 covers, Figures 22, 23, 26, 28, and 30 show Cinderella smiling and on display during the moment of her transformation from ordinary girl into princess. Additionally, the covers overwhelmingly feature pink and purple as dominant colors instead of the variety of color choices illustrators used in the second half of the twentieth century. Thus, in Figures 2 and 23-28, Cinderella is wearing a pink or purple dress, while her dresses in Figures 22 and 30 have pink or pink and purple trim, and the covers shown in Figures 2, 22, and 29 have pink or purple backgrounds. This trend toward 'girl colors' is a reflection of what Orenstein has termed 21st-century 'girlie-girl' marketing, whereby all girls' toys – even such items as baseball bats – appear to be almost uniformly produced in pinks and purples. Finally, in Figures 22, 23, 27, and 28, Cinderella is depicted as younger and more cartoonish on these covers than in previous decades, indicating an attempt by the illustrators to make the books appeal to a younger, 'little girl'





audience. The result is a series of covers which both conform to and reinforce the girly-girl 'princess' ideal little girls today are invited to consume.

In sum, the current research demonstrates that the growing trend in modern Cinderella covers is not to focus on the virtuous and submissive behavior for which Cinderella is rewarded but, instead, to focus on the reward itself – the beautiful dress by which Cinderella is made the object of attention and admiration. Modern covers invite little girls to aspire to Cinderella's transformation from the shabby and ordinary to the glorious and extraordinary, but without facing any of the suffering Cinderella originally endured or demonstrating any of the virtues she originally stood for. Thus, these covers contribute to the siren call of current princess culture that young girls can *magically become princesses*, and by doing so, helps to perpetuate and reinforce this commodified fairy-tale dream.



## FIGURES

- Fig 1. *Cinderella* (1888). New York: McLoughlin Bros.
- Fig 2. *Cinderella* (2004). Sydney: Publishing International.
- Fig 3. *Cinderella or the Little Glass Slipper* (1901). New York: McLoughlin Bros.
- Fig 4. *Cinderella and the Glass Slipper* (1920). Chicago: M.A. Donohue & Co.
- Fig 5. *Cinderella* (1926). Akron, NY: Saafeld Publishing Co.
- Fig 6. *Cinderella* (1915). New York: Cupples & Leon Co.
- Fig 7. Merrill AD (1935) *Cinderella*. Racine, WI: Whitman Publishing Co.
- Fig 8. *Cinderella* (1931). Sandusky, OH: Harter Publishing Co.
- Fig 9. *Cinderella* (1938). New York: Garden Publishing Co.
- Fig 10. *Cinderella* (nd). London: Raphael Tuck & Sons.
- Fig 11. Disney W (1950) *Walt Disney's Cinderella*. Racine, WI: Golden Press.
- Fig 12. *Cinderella* (1961). Racine, WI: Whitman Publishing Co.
- Fig 13. *Cinderella* (1983). Brimax Books.
- Fig 14. *Cinderella* (1979). Mahwah, NJ: Troll Associates.
- Fig 15. *Cinderella* (1960). New York: Golden Press.
- Fig 16. Perrault C (1999) *Cinderella*. North-South Books.
- Fig 17. Hanshaw CA (1993) *Cinderella: The Fairy Tale*. Pleasanton, CA: YES! Entertainment Corp.
- Fig 18. Knight H (1978) *Hillary Knight's Cinderella*. New York: Random House.
- Fig 19. Broadley M (1965) *Cinderella*. New York: Playmore, Inc.
- Fig 20. Magner C (1993) *Cinderella*. Cincinnati, OH: Mount Washington Press.
- Fig 21. Geras A (1996) *Cinderella*. East Sussex: Macdonald Young Books.
- Fig 22. *Cinderella* (2008), adapted by Michiyo Hayano, trans. C Nich, illus. POP. Milwaukee, OR: Dark Horse Books.
- Fig 23. Tyrrell M (2002) *Cinderella: A Fairytale Foil Book*. New York: Price Stern Sloan.
- Fig 24. Woodward K (2012) *Cinderella*. London: Carlton Books.
- Fig 25. Pirotta S (2008) *If You Love a Fairy Tale: Cinderella and The Frog Prince*. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Services.
- Fig 26. Eilenberg M (2008) *Cinderella*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Fig 27. Baxter N (2009) *Cinderella*. Leicester: Anness Publishing.
- Fig 28. Hughes M (2009) *Cinderella*. Bath: Parragon Books.
- Fig 29. *Cinderella* (2010). Sywell, Northants: Igloo Books.
- Fig 30. Sanderson R (2002) *Cinderella*. Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co.



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LINDA A ROBINSON is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. She holds a JD from Emory University and a PhD in cinema studies from Northwestern University. She is a film historian and currently teaches in the area of media studies, including such courses as introduction to cinema, the history of cinema, the history of mass communication, and the law of mass communication. Her research interests include film adaptation, cinematic nostalgia, and the cinematic construction of the past. She also collects Cinderella picture books, which has spawned a new research interest in the visual communication occurring in Cinderella picture-book illustrations over time. Her most recent publications include 'Looking backward to move forward: Walt Disney's use of so dear to my heart to make the move into live action' in *Animation Journal*; 'The age of innocence: A case study of remediation' in *Popular Culture Review*; 'Crinolines and pantalettes: What MGM's switch in time did to *Pride and Prejudice* (1940)' in *Adaptation*; and a co-authored chapter with Susan Wildermuth on how 'ugly' and 'beautiful' are conceptualized and portrayed in Cinderella picture books in *New Perspectives on Gender in Children's and Young Adult Literature: Teen Dreams and Lost Girls* (ed. Tricia Clasen Holly Hassel, Routledge, forthcoming, 2015).

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